

CCC INTERVIEW WITH ALVIN FORD

Date: June 21, 2002

Location: Des Moines, Iowa

Interviewer: Larry Wilson

DNR: Where was your hometown?

Al: Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

DNR: How old were you when you enrolled?

Al: 18.

DNR: Why did you enroll in the CCC's?

Al: I needed a job.

DNR: What CCC camp was you assigned to?

Al: 2715. It was at Chariton. We stopped at Indianola, number 7069 first because Chariton wasn't finished. We worked out of Lake Ahquabi and then went to Chariton.

DNR: Do you remember the dates?

Al: It was 1934. I went in July 12, 1934. I was in 21 months and got out the 21st of April in '36.

DNR: What was the first day like in camp?

Al: They picked us up at the federal building and took us to Indianola. We got our physical and shots and clothing. They gave us an army uniform and fatigues. They gave you some toiletries, but from then on, you bought them.

DNR: Did you take any personal items with you?

Al: I took some extra overalls.

DNR: Were there any items they didn't want you to bring?

Al: There were a lot of things they didn't want you to bring.

DNR: How were you assigned a barracks?

Al: They just did it. In Indianola we were in tents. In Chariton we were in tents until the fall. Then we moved into the barracks. It was on the east city limits of Chariton. They gave you sheets, blankets and comforter. Albert Andriano and Rex Marsh were in the same barracks as me.

DNR: Did every get along in the barracks?

Al: They were very congenial.

DNR: How was the food?

Al: Real good food. The CCC boys did the cooking.

DNR: How were the holiday meals?

Al: They would have a feast. Turkey and ham. They fed real good.

DNR: When was payday?

Al: End of the month. You got \$5 and \$25 went home.

DNR: How did you spend your money?

Al: I saved my money.

DNR: What did you do on the weekends?

Al: I took the Rock Island train. I hitchhiked home. I rode the freight trains. I would go to town. I used to come home.

DNR: Was the Sabbath observed on Sunday?

Al: The camp had church service.

DNR: Were there sports?

Al: There seem to be 24 guys in a barracks and build a team out of them to play ball.

DNR: Did you have any personal conflicts in the camp?

Al: No.

DNR: If someone got into trouble what would happen?

Al: They would have to rake the walks and pull weeds. Sometimes KP.

DNR: Were there educational and vocational training?

Al: They did. They tried to do that with some of the guys. They had a teacher who was an officer, wore big round glasses. He had classes. Engineering and stuff like that. I never took any classes.

DNR: The classes were at the camp?

Al: In the camp and at Chariton.

DNR: What kind of work did you do at the Indianola camp?

Al: They used us to pile brush.

DNR: Then you went down to Chariton?

Al: We did soil and erosion work. We planted small trees. We built earthen dams for farmers. We built concrete spillways and built lots of fence.

DNR: Did you learn any skills?

Al: It just taught you how to work.

DNR: Do you remember the names of any of our leaders?

Al: His name was Tom Stokowski and Steager was a leader. I worked on a rock quarry in Melrose, south of there. We were making lime for the fertilizer. They had lime spreaders.

DNR: Were the farms in bad shape?

Al: Yes. Banker's Life owned the majority of the farms in Iowa in the '30's.

DNR: Did you guys get along?

Al: There was no trouble.

DNR: Where did you drive your truck?

Al: To Ames and Osceola.

DNR: Highway 34?

Al: Yes. I drove the truck after being there 8 months. Duckworth, he married a girl from Chariton and farmed all of his life. He was in the camp. I was working at Armstrong, 33 years, 7 months.

DNR: Did you use any special type of equipment?

Al: Everything was manual. Cross cut saws.

DNR: How was it issued to you?

Al: Each truck had two trunks on it. It contained the tools and seeds.

DNR: Do you remember any of your fellow workers?

Al: Earl Dee.

DNR: Did everyone get along on the job?

Al: Yes.

DNR: Did the country and city kids get along?

Al: It didn't make a difference.

DNR: Were there minorities in the camp?

Al: No. But I remember a Lieutenant Ferguson of the U.S. Army asking a guy laying on his cot, 'Are you a niggah?' The boy was from Arkansas and was Caucasian but had a good tan. He sent him back to Fort Des Moines.

DNR: Did you get injured at work?

Al: No injuries at all.

DNR: Did you have a place to go if injured?

Al: We had an infirmary with nurses or orderlies.

DNR: Did you have a problem with diseases?

Al: No.

DNR: Were there any rodent or insect problems?

Al: No. Everything was military like. They had so many guys that were so sloppy. One guy from Waterloo, we called panther piss. He carried water around the field. He didn't like to take baths. So one day at inspection, the officer said to take him down for a G.I. bath.

DNR: Did you do any work for the community?

Al: No.

DNR: You hauled miners around?

Al: I would haul the miners up to Williamson to the coal mine.

DNR: Did you have any contacts with the outside community?

Al: Rose Mengel. She married Rex Morrison; he and I were friends.

DNR: Were there any Masonic organizations?

Al: No.

DNR: Were there problems between the CCC's and the local boys?

Al: No. We had guys that came in as local woodsmen. They worked just like everybody else.

DNR: How did the two towns view the CCC camp?

Al: Favorably because we raised the economics of the place.

DNR: Do you have a memorable experience?

Al: Nothing.

DNR: Any odd experiences?

Al: No.

DNR: What was your biggest accomplishment?

Al: Building these dams with a concrete spillway in Lucas County. The spillway prevented the dam from blowing out.

DNR: How was your life changed in the CCC's?

Al: I don't know.

DNR: Roosevelt had a good program?

Al: I think so.

DNR: After the C's what did you do?

Al: I drove a truck for six months hauling butter and eggs. I did it during the summer. Then I went into the coalmine. It was located at Easter Lake. I worked there until '41. I went to work in the filling stations. Then I got a job at the ordnance plant in the summer until I was drafted in the spring of '42. They sent us to the Air Force in Lubbock, Texas. I volunteered for gunnery. But they didn't take me for the B-24's. I got shipped to Sicily for two days. Then we went into Toronto, Italy. Then I left there and went to Baria, Italy. Then they sent me to Africa. All over Africa. I was there in spring of '43, then we came back to Naples, Italy. That's when Vesuvius blew up. I got out of the service in November of '45. I went to Armstrong Rubber for 33 years. Then they sold to Pirelli. I was a mechanic and maintenance. I retired when I was 62 in '76.

END OF TRANSCRIPTION – SAM J. HAIM

Updated by Larry Wilson July 18, 2005 after review with Alvin Ford.